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For Immediate Release
March 18, 2013

Navajo President Shelly Signs FEMA Agreement

MENTMORE, N.M. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly signed a tribal agreement with the Federal Emergency Management Administration on Thursday opening the door for FEMA to help reimburse the Navajo Nation with costs related to Operation Winter Freeze.

“Today, the Navajo Nation is taking a new step into establishing our sovereignty as we are going to sign an agreement with the Federal Emergency Management Administration,” President Shelly said before he signed the agreement.

The Navajo Nation is the second Native American nation to sign an agreement since amendments in the Stafford Act allowed tribes to directly ask the President of the United States to declare a disaster.

FEMA Region 9 Administrator Nancy Ward signed the agreement for FEMA.

The agreement specifies FEMA and the Navajo Nation will share costs from the emergency that left as many as 18,000 people without running water due to frozen pipes. FEMA will share 75 percent of the costs, according to the agreement.



Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly (rights) stands with FEMA Region 9 Administrator Nancy Ward before the signing of the tribal agreement.

The Navajo Nation is eligible for reimbursement funding for costs related to restoring water to homes and costs for structural repairs to prevent future waterline freezing.

The total costs have yet to be determined but Navajo Department of Emergency Management initially estimates that the total cost of repairs stemming from Operation Winter Freeze is more than \$7 million.

On March 5, President Barack Obama declared that a major disaster existed on Navajo Nation lands, the agreement states.

“The Navajo Nation is taking a new step on the path of recognized sovereignty,” President Shelly said, “We hope today’s signing will lead to more direct recognition and communication with other agencies and departments within the federal government.”

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